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*OLD CHINESE
PORCELAIN*

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INTRODUCTION

THE object of this illustrated booklet is to give some assistance to the amateur by showing a few fine examples representing various periods of Chinese ceramic art, and by furnishing an outline of its great and ancient history.

Chinese porcelains possess such qualities of intrinsic beauty that in the decoration of the home their exquisite form and colour harmonise completely with all other surrounding objects, whether sombre or brilliant. The choice is wide enough to satisfy the most fastidious taste, the most delicate preception.

The development of the potter's art from the archaic products of the Han Dynasty proceeded but slowly through the ages until the Sung dynasty, in which a decided advance was shown. The Yuan Dynasty, founded by Kublai Khan in 1280, was overthrown by T'ai Tsu, the son of a labourer, who, in 1368, under the title of Hung-Wu, established the Ming Dynasty, during which, and notably under the Emperor Ching-Hwa, the manufacture of porcelain reached the highest degree of excellence. This

was maintained by the three Emperors of the succeeding Ch'ing Dynasty, Kang-He, Yung-Ching, and Kien Lung. Then came the degradation of the art to commercialism, and its decadence.

Only a few words need be said about the present prices, which may appear to the uninitiated to be high. It must, however, be borne in mind that fine examples were at all times very costly. Their production involved the life-long labour of great artists, who often used very valuable materials. History shows that choice pieces were only made during periods of great national prosperity in the Chinese Empire, where in recent years higher prices have been paid by native collectors than by any others. The increasing scarcity of exceptional examples is due to bequests to the Museums and to an ever-growing number of earnest collectors. These facts justify the assumption that prices have by no means reached finality.

Han Dynasty

(*B.C. 206 to A.D. 220*).

THE illustration on the opposite page is a very good example of the fictile art of the Han period, which marks the commencement of the development of the art of Chinese porcelain. Although the ware produced was lacking in those qualities of translucency and whiteness which distinguish porcelain, it revealed a decided advance in the beauty of its forms. In some examples a glaze is not used, and the texture of the body somewhat resembles terra-cotta, reminding one very much of the early Tanagra figurines of the Greek world in the 5th and 6th centuries.

By native connoisseurs the lustrous dark green glaze derived from copper is universally attributed to this period. This glaze, which may be compared to a camellia-leaf or cucumber-rind, upon a body of buff-coloured, red, or yellow fine-grained pottery, or stoneware, will in some pieces be found partly vitrified, so that when struck with the finger nail it gives forth a musical sound. The green glaze is nearly always iridescent with age.

It is interesting to learn that a number of specimens of this Han ware, including vases of varied forms, figures of animals, models of household utensils, rice mills, etc., etc., have recently been found in the excavations for the new railway in North China. They attract much attention, for many collectors who have the finest specimens of Chinese porcelain have some affection for this archaic faience and stoneware.

Certainly, the amateur who is desirous of forming a collection to show the evolution of the ceramic art of China, must include some pieces from the time when the new word *tz'ü* (that is, porcelain) was first found in the books of the Han Dynasty.

HAN DYNASTY (B.C. 206 to A.D. 220).

Sung Dynasty

(A.D. 960-1280).

THE Sung period marks the introduction of fine glazes similar to that upon the specimen illustrated, which is covered by an exquisite soft blue, finely crackled. Though still dealing with the manufacture of primitive art, the pottery was giving way to the industry of the porcelain, notably at Ching-tê-Chên, the Imperial works. It was at this place, and during the existence of this dynasty, that porcelain was for the most part covered with glazes of single colours, sometimes uniform in tint, and in other instances mottled or splashed; showing a surface which was crackled (as the illustration) or plain.

Prominent amongst the monochrome glazes are those verging upon white, with greys having a tint of blue or purple, and greens ranging from celadon to olive, whilst special mention must be made of the grass or brilliant onion-green. In addition there are browns from the lightest to the darkest shades, reds, and purples. There are a few glazes which must be specially noted; the *clair-de-lune*, a pale grey-blue, and the *aubergine*, a lovely deep purple, made at Chün-chou, now Yu-chon in Honan province.

Other glazes from the same factories are most beautiful examples of transmutation flambes or *vas-pien*, in which brilliant reds pass through every intermediate shade of purple to pale blue, or splashes of red and blue produce effects which are in many cases unique.

The usual type of objects belonging to this period may be classed as cabinet specimens, including plates, bowls, dishes, small vases, wine-jars, wine-ewers, flower-holders, and sacrificial vessels of quaint form and attractive colour, examples of which collectors ever wish to acquire.

SUNG DYNASTY (A.D. 960-1280).

Ming Dynasty

(A.D. 1368-1644).

AT the commencement of the long Ming period, the Chinese *porcelainiers* made great progress in their art by producing beautiful decorative objects which were designed for use in the temples. Now they are eagerly sought after by all European and American lovers of Chinese ceramics, not only because they rank as magnificent specimens of porcelain, but also because they are so effective as decorative objects.

The vase illustrated is a very fine example having the rare ground of turquoise blue. Generally the glaze is dark blue splashed or mottled with turquoise, or turquoise blue and manganese purple with touches of yellow. To this archaic Ming may be traced the later turquoise and purple of Kang-He and the Kishiu ware of Japan. But it must not be forgotten that the Ming period yielded much more than this. In the first half of the 15th century Hsuan-Te adopted under-glaze decoration in cobalt blue and copper red, a process in which the whole piece with its decoration and glaze was fired at one operation of the *grand feu*. When somewhat later the resources of the muffle kiln were utilised by Ching-Hwa, enamel colours were employed not only as ground washes to heighten the effect of the blue or other decoration, but as the colours in the decoration itself, with or without the blue under the glaze. Enamel coloured grounds and enamel coloured decoration were applied to the unglazed white porcelain, "The Biscuit," which had received the firing of the *grand feu*, and were fixed by a second firing in the muffle kiln and then glazed.

As before noted, the Chinese at this period were especially occupied in producing vases of different forms and colours, and figures of many divinities, all of which were intended for the use of the Emperors, or for the service of the temples.

MING DYNASTY (A.D. 1368-1644).

Ming. Ching-Hwa, Emperor

(1465-1488).

THE very beautiful vase illustrated upon the opposite page is a type of the class generally known in Europe as *famille noire* and in America as "Black Hawthorn." It was made in the reign of Ching-Hwa when the Royal patronage secured the highest development of painting in enamels on porcelain, which had hitherto been shown.

The rare examples of this particular time were decorated on various coloured backgrounds, including the rich greens, the black, and the yellow, all of these having coloured decoration similar in feeling to that shown in the illustration. Pieces of this character are most eagerly sought after and keenly appreciated by all amateurs of art. These descriptions cover the most highly priced objects in Chinese art, perhaps the most valuable of all being the black hawthorn with blossoms and flowers in red.

At this time the finest monochromes were also made, notably *sang-de-bœuf* and other reds, apple-green and other greens, all of the fine examples containing crackle, and the porcelain was always in biscuit.

The industry being very greatly developed by the Emperor Ching-Hwa, numerous objects other than vases were made in similar character to the two types already referred to, including figures for temples, fine plates and dishes, and many articles of domestic utility.

MING. CHING-HWA, EMPEROR (1465-1488).

CH'ING DYNASTY (A.D. 1644 to the present day).
KANG-HE EMPEROR (1662-1723).

Ch'ing Dynasty

(A.D. 1644 to the present day).

Kang-He, Emperor (1662-1723).

HIS illustration shows a typical *famille-verte* vase of fine quality of the Kang-He period. The Emperor Kang-He followed very closely in the steps of the Emperor Ching-Hwa in developing the potter's art, and greatly extended its scope and operations so as to include objects of every description and decoration in all its forms. He continued the production of the beautiful coloured grounds in green, black and yellow, but he produced a lovely green enamel decoration, the superb *famille-verte* of Jacquemart, and he excelled in the quality of his blues as well as in his polychromes.

When we consider the Powder-Blue so suggestive of purest lapis lazuli or the perfection of the cobalt blue under the glaze, we must place them first in their class as beyond compare. The Powder-Blue is either applied all over the surface with or without designs in gold, or panels are left reserved in white and decorated in *famille-verte* or in blue painted under the glaze. The under-glaze blue so much appreciated and imitated by the Dutch is the perfected work which originated under the Ming Emperors early in the 15th century.

Under the same Emperor very fine *sang-de-bœuf* and apple-green monochrome glazes challenge comparison with any ever made. Even more remarkable are the wonderful peach-bloom examples which to-day are perhaps more highly prized than any other kind of Chinese porcelain, considering the size of the objects, which are nearly always small. Almost equal to these in value are the beautiful pearl-greys and delicate blues. The finest qualities of the latter have been characterised by the Chinese as "Blue as the sky after rain."

The reign of the Emperor Kang-He is regarded as the epoch in which the Chinese reached the zenith of their ceramic art.

YUNG-CHING, EMPEROR (1723-1736).

Yung-Ching, Emperor

(1723-1736).

THE vase in the illustration is a very charming and typical example of the fine beautiful porcelain made during the short reign of the Emperor Yung-Ching, known to the Chinese as "King of the Potters."

The lovely egg-shell porcelain of this and the succeeding reign is not only marvellous in its delicate strength, but it is distinguished by the rose-reds of crimson and pink, the celebrated tints derived from gold, which come under the denomination of the *famille-rose*, which dominate this period, and that which follows, not only in the painted enamel decoration, but as the ground of ruby-backed or pink-backed plates and of rare types of vases which are much in request.

The superb tints *rose do'r* or *roug do'r* and *rose du Barri* are often associated with other soft colours in decoration of extraordinary fineness, all exquisite in colour and execution, perfect in harmonious coloring, admirable in technical skill equally in the painting of the minute details and the actual art of potting, the last having special reference to fine egg-shell vases and lanterns. Amongst the other soft colours which are employed with *rose d'or* are delicate shades of yellow, blue, purple and green. The greens are much thinner than those of the *famille verte* of the preceding reign.

The reproduction of the ancient porcelain was as much a part of the work at Ching-tê-Chên as the invention of novel forms and methods of ornament. Yet it was in the production and decoration of the egg-shell porcelain that the potters in the reign of Yung-Ching achieved their greatest triumphs, which to-day are beloved by collectors. The amateur will find but little difficulty in recognising such delicate fine work.

KEIN-LUNG (1736-1796).

Kien-Lung

(1736-1796).

It is as difficult to choose a single object as a representative illustration of this period as it is to choose one for that of the Emperor Kang-He. During the whole of the long reign of the Emperor Kien-Lung, the industry received so much attention, was so fostered and developed, that the climax of the art, though differing and distinct from that of Kang-He, was reached and decadence followed when Kien-Lung's reign ended. He had maintained the productions which had been introduced by the Emperor Yung-Ching, besides introducing new types and trying to revive the earlier monochromes. In the latter he signally failed, as he also did in his efforts to imitate the rare grounds which the Emperor Ching-hwa had originated and improved. Fine examples of these specimens which were made solely for the palace are scarce, but they provide decorative objects of rare beauty, exceedingly interesting too from the student's point of view, who can compare the porcelain made for the Emperor's own use with that which was made for the European market. The Chinese decoration was copied by the European manufacturers of china, *i.e.* porcelain, but it was unintelligible and soon degenerated, and the European designs painted by the Chinese were no better as a rule.

Many of the objects produced for Imperial use still survive, and amongst those which have come out of China may be found some beautiful vases, deserving fully the attention of collectors. It is impossible in a short publication such as this to describe them. It is only necessary to say that the amateur could soon learn to recognise them by the fine quality of the porcelain, the minuteness of the decoration, and the brilliancy of the glaze.

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